



Building a place for community

The Sedona Community Center embraces a broader vision

Text and photos by Marty Macurak, Sedona Communications Manager

On a typically beautiful midday

in Red Rock country, 20 people enter the dining room of the Sedona Community Center and array themselves at table rounds for small talk and a professionally-prepared meal of chicken teriyaki, veggies, rice, salad and fortune cookies. Each course is gracefully proffered by a small group of volunteer wait staff, each course accepted with gratitude.

"I was spending too much time alone," says Steve Gardner, who's been coming to the center for weekday lunch for the past year. "The meals make a difference, but they're almost serendipity. The fellowship is what's important."

Founded in 1984 by the local Kachina Retired Teachers Association as a community gathering place, the center one year later adopted a home food delivery program created by Sedona resident Margaret Flynn and a friend. Nutrition is still the heart of the operation with Meals on Wheels, weekday Congregate Lunches and Weekend/Breakfast Club food delivery. Piya Jacob, vice president of the SCC Board of Directors, observes that the

center's mobile services "bring the community to you when you no longer can be a part of the larger community. We remind you that you still count, that you are still part of something greater than yourself."

Today's Sedona Community Center also offers art, exercise and meditation classes, telephone welfare checks, discussion groups, and special events designed to foster connections among seniors.

But there is a vision for more, for all ages.

"We would like to increase our visibility and attract new people," says Jacob. "We ask ourselves 'is there a need in Sedona the community center could fill?' Perhaps a cooking class or homework club for teenagers, English as Second Language classes, or a spot for live music. With TV, smart phones and the disappearance of the town square we have lost the common gathering place. The Sedona Community Center is striving to provide that place."



Volunteer Jan Shreve prepares weekend breakfast baskets

City and community support

A significant portion of SCC's work is made possible by the Sedona City Council, which recently approved a new, annual funding allocation of \$165,000 through 2020, roughly a third of the center's budget. The money is awarded through a formal service contract process that evaluates recipients' public purpose, administrative and financial strength, and performance.

"We could not do what we do without city funding," says Executive Director Brenda Redel. "That funding is paramount."

Cash and other donations from individuals and a wide variety of Sedona and Village of Oak Creek businesses— "far too many to name them all," says Redel—are another important source of support. Smaller amounts of

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—Piya Jacob, vice president, SCC Board of Directors

funding from the Northern Arizona Council of Governments and state of Arizona round out the budget.

In the fiscal year ending July 2017, the center served 5,774 Congregate Lunches and delivered 15,155 meals to homebound seniors.



Receptionist Peggy Denton does double-duty on lunch prep.

Managing the kitchen and its deliverables is Peggy Rivera, who left a career in corporate management in California for a new life among the Red Rocks. After a few years of administrative work in Sedona, Rivera pursued her passion as a prep chef at SCC, eventually becoming head chef, and, putting those administrative skills back to work, later added the job of kitchen manager.

"Working here is a dream realized for me," she says. "I can create, I can meet and serve our senior population as well as the general public, and I get to learn and develop new recipes. SCC has a

wonderful staff that feels like family. We also have, I believe, the best volunteer team in town." The center received 80,000 hours of volunteer services from local residents last year.

Overseeing all of the people, the place and the work is Redel, a gregarious, welcoming presence in the lobby and dining room of the one-story building on Melody Lane. "Within a week," says Steve Gardner, "she knew everyone by name." Shortly after arriving in 2017, Redel set a goal to add even more value to SCC's award-winning services.

A broader vision

One way to do that is to realize a vision to expand use of the facility as a

community resource for all ages, for classes, socializing, and for meetings and events. Facility rentals, a total of 473 in 2016, supplement funding for nutrition programs; the building has two large meeting rooms with audio-visual equipment and an outdoor area that features a lush garden, patio, rotunda and barbeque pit.

Unfortunately the grounds have accessibility and other issues that limit the potential to expand services.

"We can't use our outdoor space as we'd like," Redel says, "because the elevation changes, stairways and paver pathways aren't entirely safe or accessible. We'd love to have an outdoor deck and

space that could become a Sedona gathering place, and we also need to improve our indoor facilities if we want to become a community center that can be used by all ages."

Additional challenges include damage to the building's exterior façade and gutters, a parking lot flow that causes safety concerns during Meals on Wheels loading, aging audio-visual equipment, and a kitchen freezer and storage area that no longer meets demand.

Redel would like to upgrade the center in stages. Architectural planning is being provided by Matt Dougan Design, with landscape design to occur later, perhaps followed by phased construction funded through a combination of cash donations and donated professional and contractor services.

"I would love to double usage of the Sedona Community Center," she says. "Wouldn't it be great to have an art program for children here? And a coffee bar where people of all ages could get together?"

The Sedona Community Center is located at 2615 Melody Ln. at the corner of Melody Lane and Harmony Drive. Website address: sccsedona.org.

To help

To support the center's facility improvement drive through the donation of money, labor, goods or professional expertise call (928) 282-2834 or send an email to info@sccsedona.org.



The courtyard is lush but not accessible.

Photos

Clockwise An exercise class at the Sedona Community Center; Artist's rendering of an upgraded community meeting room; Artist's rendering of an improved courtyard; The center wish list includes expanded storage areas.

